

# Seymour Board of Education



## Minutes: Special BOE Meeting – Budget Workshop

April 29, 2025

Seymour Middle School

6:00 pm

Board Members Present: Chris Champagne, Board Chairperson  
Kristen Bruno, Vice Chairperson  
Lori Nespoli  
Ed Strumello  
Jim Garofolo  
Jay Hatfield (via phone)  
Kristen Harmeling (via phone)

Board Members Absent: Stephan Behuniak  
Pete Kubik

Others in Attendance: Dr. Susan Compton, Superintendent  
Attorney Floyd Dugas  
Dr. Kris Boyle, Director of Pupil Services  
Salvatore Bucci, Business Manager  
Mary Sue Feige, Director of Curriculum & Instruction  
David Olechna, CLS Principal  
Shannon Levey, Board Clerk

### I. CALL TO ORDER

A. Pledge of Allegiance – Mr. Champagne called the meeting to order at 6:10 PM, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. Board member introductions were conducted, with Kristen Harmeling and Jay Hatfield participating via telephone.

### II. PUBLIC COMMENT

Public Comment provides the opportunity for the public to make a comment. It is not a dialogue between the Board and the public. Based upon what is heard during Public Comment, the Board may choose to add a topic to the agenda. If questions are posed that the Chairperson is able to answer, those questions may be addressed under the Chairperson's Comments portion of the agenda. The Board will not discuss personnel matters. Comments should be respectful and no longer than 3 minutes in length so that all who wish to comment may have the opportunity to do so. All the public wanting to comment will need to state their name and address for the record prior to addressing the Board.

- Public comment called three times, no comment.

### III. DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION

A. Seymour Education Budget 2025-2026 Review

1. Mr. Champagne referenced the budget sheet for the Seymour Board of Education prepared by Salvatore Bucci. Mr. Champagne noted that the Board has made total reductions of approximately \$1.5 million since the start of the budget process. He reviewed the itemized changes, which included staffing adjustments, employee benefit modifications, and other reductions. Dr. Compton emphasized the significant staffing cuts that have been made. While one or two teaching positions have been added to enhance 21st-century programming, the overall reduction in personnel has been substantial. She explained that the district is having to "piece things together" to meet state mandates. For instance, the Language Arts Consultant is

being redirected to address multi language requirements. In Pre-K, the Elementary Inclusion Facilitator will return to the classroom as a teacher due to increased enrollment and changes in kindergarten entry age, which have driven the need for additional staff.

These reductions resulted in a remaining gap of \$325,215.

To address this, further cuts were proposed:

- Reduction of Seymour Middle School science teacher, music teacher, French program and teacher: \$271,400
- Student-provided supplies: \$53,815

These adjustments bring the total to the needed \$325,215 reduction.

2. Dr. Compton invited Attorney Floyd Dugas to the table and shared her concerns regarding the significant budget reductions. She emphasized the difficult position the district is in, stating that while cuts must be made, they are deeply affecting the quality of education. She noted that the elimination of a music teacher is a direct hit to the arts program and that staffing shifts will be required to cover open positions, primarily through internal transfers, attrition, and creative scheduling. Dr. Compton has been reviewing teacher certifications to identify those qualified to teach multiple content areas in an effort to minimize disruptions. However, she expressed concern about the broader implications of these changes. The district's STEM programming—including robotics, coding, and technology education—is being sacrificed, as the staff member overseeing that program will now be reassigned. "We are losing ground every year," she said, adding, "We are no longer going to be the Seymour School District we were once known for." Dr. Compton highlighted the district's academic successes as evidence of its past strength, referencing the current valedictorian who has been accepted to Harvard, Yale, and MIT, as well as other students who have achieved National Merit Commendations and Ivy League acceptances. "This is what Seymour Public Schools can do," she said. She concluded by expressing her frustration and sorrow over the continued reductions: "I didn't come to Seymour to cut staffing—I came to enhance programs and build opportunities for students. Every year it's cut, cut, cut. A town and community is only as strong as its educational system. We've got to stop the bleeding—we've been completely gutted."

Mr. Champagne asked if class sizes are expected to increase due to the proposed reductions. Dr. Compton responded that, at this time, while core class sizes will remain manageable, scheduling will now include more study halls due to staffing constraints. She noted that the part-time music teacher who split time between Seymour Middle School (SMS) and Seymour High School (SHS) will be reassigned to Chatfield-LoPresti School (CLS) to fill a vacancy. As a result, the current SMS music teacher will now be responsible for both general music and chorus, reducing the variety of Unified Arts offerings—such as Music Technology—for students.

Additionally, the elimination of the French program a few years ago at SMS is contributing to the gradual decline of the French program at SHS. Dr. Compton also explained that "student-provided supplies," including crayons, pencils, and notebooks—which have traditionally been funded by the Board of Education—will now become the responsibility of families. Students will receive classroom-specific supply lists from their teachers.

Ms. Bruno inquired about the STEM program, which falls under Unified Arts. Dr. Compton confirmed that due to staff reassignments, the STEM program is being eliminated. Additionally, the high school music teacher worked a 0.4/0.6 split between SMS and SHS; however, reductions have left SMS with only one full-time music teacher, and SHS with reduced coverage as well.

Mr. Champagne expressed concern that overburdening teachers may lead to burnout and resignations, noting the challenge of attracting high-quality educators under such conditions.

Mr. Garofolo addressed the results of the recent referendum, pointing out that only about 10% of registered voters participated. He stressed that the Board lacks meaningful insight into the community's rationale for rejecting the budget, aside from limited anecdotal feedback. "We have a district in need, and a responsibility to the children—the future of our community, our state, and our nation," he said. He questioned the community's priorities, remarking that while some families readily spend on material items for their children, education often takes a back seat. "Why is there this continual tug-of-war with the community when it comes to investing in our schools?"

Ms. Bruno acknowledged the frustration, but urged a balanced approach. "We must continue advocating for our students and staff," she said, "but we also need to listen to the community." She noted that several public meetings were held and the Board made efforts to remain accessible, however, attendance at the meetings was limited. She recognized the impact of recent financial developments, including unexpected changes to property assessments and the vehicle tax, which have placed additional strain on families. "It's a balance," she concluded. "While we must advocate for students, we must also be receptive to the community's realities."

Mr. Champagne emphasized that misinformation continues to circulate—particularly the claim that Seymour Public Schools has an overly large central office. "We have one of the smallest central offices in the state of Connecticut," he said. "We've already eliminated two administrative positions—we're operating at bare bones." He shared his recent experience attending a community band event hosted by SMS, and noted that such opportunities may disappear if further cuts are made due to a lack of custodial support and other essential services.

No action was taken at this time, pending any potential changes.

The district has now reached a total of \$1.5 million in budget reductions.

- B. Review Budget Reductions – (Pay to Participate Sports/Clubs, Personnel, Programs, Student Supplies)**
1. What happens if the next budget referendum fails? The Board reviewed the impact of existing and potential future budget reductions, including considerations around Pay-to-Participate models for sports and extracurricular activities, personnel cuts, program eliminations, and student supplies. Board members discussed the serious implications if the next budget referendum fails. It was noted that while the district has made every effort to preserve programs in academics, athletics, and the arts, further cuts may be unavoidable. One significant possibility includes the implementation of Pay-to-Participate for sports and extracurricular clubs—a model already adopted by several other districts. For years, the Board of Education has fully funded athletics to the best of its ability, and Seymour's athletic and club programs have thrived. However, parents may need to prepare for the possibility of contributing financially to support their children's participation.

Additional concerns included the suspension of the district's athletic uniform replacement cycle, meaning teams may not receive new uniforms for an extended period. Another example, a proposed track and field program at Seymour Middle School, once seen as a promising addition, will now be postponed or canceled entirely.

In a worst-case scenario, the district could face a Reduction in Force (RIF)—a step not previously taken in recent memory. This could result in layoffs of teachers, counselors, psychologists, or other essential personnel. Dr. Compton stressed that these decisions would be guided by contractual obligations and seniority lists. "We are reaching a point where further

reductions are no longer sustainable,” she said. “There are limits on class sizes, graduation requirements, and mandated services that we must meet.”

The hope was expressed by all that such drastic measures will not become necessary, but the potential consequences of another failed referendum were made clear: “If this happens, it would be truly devastating for our students, staff, and community.”

- C. Review Minimum Budget Requirement and Legal Obligations to Seymour Public School students in advancing the educational interests of the State in accordance with Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-4a.
1. Mr. Champagne introduced Attorney Floyd Dugas to review the statutory requirements surrounding the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) and the legal obligations of the Seymour Public Schools under Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-4a, which addresses the advancement of educational interests in the state.

Attorney Dugas explained that the MBR is built into Connecticut law and requires that a municipality fund its Board of Education budget at no less than the amount it was funded the previous year. This provision ensures that districts cannot reduce their education budgets arbitrarily.

Seymour also has a charter provision which states that if the Board of Education budget is not approved after multiple referenda but has been reduced to the MBR plus legal obligations (such as contractual agreements), then that budget must be adopted. In this case, the community would be legally required to meet those funding levels, regardless of referendum outcomes.

Mr. Champagne emphasized the financial risk if the town fails to meet MBR: the State of Connecticut can impose penalties, including recapturing ECS funds. For example, if the budget falls short of the MBR, the town—not the Board—would be held responsible for making up the shortfall. Seymour currently receives approximately \$11.9 million in ECS funding, which is accounted for as town revenue but is designated to support the school district.

Mr. Bucci added that for every \$1 the district falls short of the MBR, the town could lose \$3 in ECS funding—further compounding financial challenges. He also noted that ECS increases have been minimal, with this year’s rise only 1.9%, and future increases are expected to remain similarly low.

Mr. Strumello observed that while the governor has proposed ECS increases, they are primarily targeted toward the five largest districts in the state, meaning smaller towns like Seymour will likely see little benefit. He stressed the importance of engaging with local legislators to advocate for more equitable funding.

Dr. Compton expressed concern about the difficult position the town and district are in, warning that the ramifications of operating at or below the MBR would be severe, especially if additional unexpected costs arise during the year.

Mr. Garofolo inquired whether any municipalities had taken legal action against their boards to restore school funding. Attorney Dugas cited Ansonia as one example and confirmed that while such legal action is an available recourse, it is not ideal, as it can cause long-lasting political and community divisions.

Dr. Compton also reminded the Board that by statute, a school district cannot end the fiscal year with a deficit, and if it does, individual Board of Education members may be held personally liable. While there are preventive steps that can be taken before reaching that point, the situation underscores the gravity of underfunding. She concluded by reviewing the district's current list of budget cuts and expressing hope that further reductions can be avoided. She reminded the public that the next referendum is scheduled for Thursday, May 1st at the Community Center. Absentee ballots are available for those who cannot attend in person. She also noted that the \$750,000 reduction made at the town meeting significantly worsened the district's budget challenges and contributed to the current crisis.

#### **IV. REPORTS**

##### **A. Chairman's Report**

1. Ms. Bruno: Emphasized the importance of educating the community on how the budget process works. Encouraged everyone to speak with their neighbors, participate in the process, and vote. Reminded attendees that the town charter outlines the budget process, including the role of town meetings. Urged residents to read the Charter Committee meeting minutes, noting that revisions are underway and necessary.
2. Mr. Strumello: Strongly encouraged all citizens to vote on both the municipal and education budgets, stressing the importance of civic participation. Highlighted that voting is a fundamental aspect of American democracy and expressed disappointment in the low voter turnout, calling it "disgusting."

##### **B.**

##### **C. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Compton expressed appreciation for the opportunity to speak and share her perspective. Stressed that it is time for public schools to be made a priority in the community.

#### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 7:04 PM.

Prepared by: Shannon Levey,  
Board Clerk